AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A computerized method for determining a community rating for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic community comprising:

maintaining a characteristic value for each <u>user</u> of the plurality of users, each characteristic value representing a rating for a given user;

maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users; and

deriving a community rating for the particular user by performing a function on the characteristic values of the users of the plurality of users related to the particular user.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the electronic community ~~is~~ <u>comprises</u> a community for ~~the~~ buying and selling of merchandise over a network.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2, wherein the network comprises the ~~internet.~~ <u>Internet.</u>

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the characteristic value is based on feedback received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic community.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4, wherein the ~~feedback is received from~~ other users <u>of the plurality of users comprise</u> ~~who~~ <u>users that</u> have ~~bought or~~

~~sold~~ previously traded goods or services with the particular user.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the set of relationships includes sponsorship relationships between the particular user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the particular user.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 6, wherein the sponsorship relationships of the plurality of users are represented as one or more n-ary trees.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 6, wherein information concerning the sponsorship relationships between the plurality of users is stored in a data ~~structures~~ structure for each user of the plurality of users.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the data structure for the particular user contains a pointer to at least one user of the plurality of users that was sponsored by the particular user.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ~~a recursive routine is used in determining a~~ the deriving of the community rating for the particular user is performed utilizing a recursive routine.

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~10,~~ 1, wherein the community rating and the characteristic values ~~are~~ comprise numerical values.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the community rating ~~is~~ comprises an aggregate of the characteristic value for each user of the plurality of users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user and the characteristic value of the particular user.

13.	(Currently Amended) A method, comprising:

maintaining a reputation value on each user of a plurality of users within an

electronic trading community through which goods and services are

bought and sold, the reputation value being derived for a particular user of

the plurality of users from feedback received concerning the particular

user from other users of the plurality of users;

maintaining a set of relationships between the plurality of users, the set of

relationships including sponsorship relationships between the particular

user and any users of the plurality of users that were sponsored by the

particular user, where the set of relationships for a particular user is

represented as an n-ary tree; and

deriving a community rating for the particular user by aggregating the reputation

value for each user of the plurality of users that is related to the particular

user through a linear sponsorship succession as is represented by the n-ary

tree in which the particular user is the root of the n-ary tree.

14.	(Currently Amended) A ~~computer-readable~~ machine-readable medium having

~~computer-executable~~ stored thereon data representing sets of instructions for

~~performing a method in a computer system for~~ determining a community rating

for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic community

~~comprising:~~ which, when executed by a machine, cause the machine to:

~~maintaining~~ maintain a characteristic value for each user of the plurality of users,

each characteristic value representing a rating for a given user;

~~maintaining~~ maintain a set of relationships between the plurality of users; and

~~deriving~~ derive a community rating for the particular user by performing a function on the characteristic values of the users of the plurality of users related to the particular user.

15.   (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ machine-readable medium of claim 14, wherein the electronic community ~~is~~ comprises a community for ~~the~~ buying and selling of merchandise using an electronic forum.

16.   (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ machine-readable medium of claim 15, wherein the characteristic value is based on feedback received from other users of the plurality of users in the electronic community.

17.   (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ machine-readable medium of claim ~~16,~~ 14, wherein the set of relationships includes sponsorship relationships.

18.   (Currently Amended) The ~~computer-readable~~ machine-readable medium of claim ~~17,~~ 14, wherein the community rating and the characteristic values ~~are~~ comprise numerical ~~values~~, and the community rating ~~is~~ comprises an aggregate of the characteristic value for each user of the plurality of users that is a lineal descendant of the particular user and the characteristic value of the particular user derived using a recursive routine.

19.   (Currently Amended) A computer system for determining a community rating for a particular user of a plurality of users within an electronic community

comprising:

a storage device having stored ~~therein~~ thereon information and data relating to one

or more sets of relationships between a plurality of users of an electronic

community, one or more characteristic values for each user of the plurality

of users, and one or more routines for determining one or more

community ratings based on the <u>one or more</u> characteristic values of each

user of the plurality of users and the <u>one or more sets of</u> relationships

between the plurality of users; and

a processor coupled to the storage device for executing the one or more routines

to derive the one or more community ratings.

20.   (Currently Amended) The computer system of claim 19, further comprising a

network interface connected with a communications network over which <u>the</u>

<u>information and</u> data ~~and information related to and including the one or more~~

~~characteristic values and one or more community values for each user of the~~

~~plurality may be~~ <u>are</u> transmitted.

21.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the <u>community</u> rating

comprises a reputation value.